

SCHOOL YEAR
2022–23



SHARING Our Success



Message from Dr. Reid



Hello Team, FCPS Families, Staff, Students, and Community,

As I begin my second year as superintendent of Fairfax County Public Schools and reflect on our accomplishments since 2022, I'd like to thank you for your wonderfully warm welcome. I'm proud to be a part of our vibrant community and, thanks to your partnership over the last year, can truly say that I'm sharing our success!

To those of you I've met with, all across our district: thank you for trusting me with your voices, ideas, and experiences. These conversations help us keep our educational commitments to our students—and as a listening leader, they're critical in helping me keep FCPS strong. To those I haven't yet had the opportunity to connect with: I'm looking forward to meeting with you! Together, we'll build on last year's progress.

This includes our 2023-30 strategic plan, which is our North Star in guiding us towards excellence, equity, and opportunity for each and every FCPS student. This student-centered, data-driven framework provides academic opportunities at every stage of public education, from ensuring a strong academic start for our youngest students to providing our graduates the tools they need to thrive in any future they choose.

I'm very much looking forward to updating you on our measurable progress in meeting these goals, which represent our fundamental commitment to our students: to provide an environment where students feel safe, supported, included, and empowered throughout their education.

Together, we're anchoring FCPS as the nation's premier school division. As we continue our journey into the 2023-24 school year and beyond, I'm thrilled for us to continue learning and leading as one community. Together, all things are possible.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michelle C. Reid".

Michelle C. Reid, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools, FCPS



FCPS

BY THE NUMBERS



181,851*

ENROLLMENT

*As of June 30, 2023

20.4%

ENGLISH FOR
SPEAKERS OF
OTHER LANGUAGES

15.7%

SPECIAL
EDUCATION

34.9%

ECONOMICALLY
DISADVANTAGED

STUDENTS
FROM

204

COUNTRIES &
TERRITORIES

200+

HOME
LANGUAGES

37% White



19% Asian

6% Multiple Races

0.1% Native Hawaiian

0.3% Native American

10% Black

28% Hispanic

94.1%

ON-TIME GRADUATION

Class of 2022 graduated on-time,
exceeding the state average rate

1185

2022 **SAT**
SCORE

FCPS students performed well
above state and global averages

15,474

2022 **ADVANCED PLACEMENT**
EXAMS TAKEN

238/842*

2023 **NATIONAL MERIT**
SEMIFINALISTS

*Commended Students



\$3.5 BILLION

TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET

79

SUPERINTENDENT
COMMUNITY
CONVERSATIONS
TOPIC-BASED
COMMUNITY MEETINGS
STRATEGIC PLANNING FORUMS



39,409*

EMPLOYEES

15,788* / **79.3%**

TEACHERS

FCPS TEACHERS HOLD
ADVANCED DEGREES

*As of June 1, 2023





EXCELLENCE EQUITY & OPPORTUNITY

2023-30 STRATEGIC PLAN

In June, the Fairfax County School Board unanimously voted to adopt Fairfax County Public Schools' 2023-30 strategic plan. FCPS' new strategic plan will direct the school division's work until the end of the decade.





The new strategic plan's development involved 124,302 engagement opportunities and significant participation from thousands of FCPS parents/caregivers, staff, students, and community members.

"Our new strategic plan sets us up for success well into the future," says Rachna Sizemore Heizer, Fairfax County School Board Chair for 2022-23, and member-at-large. "Fairfax County Public Schools is already known for educational excellence, and our strategic plan will build upon that, ensuring our students are well prepared to innovate and thrive after they leave FCPS."

The strategic plan comprises five student-centered goals; measures to monitor the progress toward those goals; equity commitments to support each and every student with attaining those goals; and four pillars that identify what FCPS must do well in order to reach our goals for all students.

The strategic plan goals include:

- **GOAL 1: Strong Start: PreK-12** | Every student will develop foundational academic skills, curiosity, and a joy for learning necessary for success in Pre-K through 12th grade.
- **GOAL 2: Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered** | Every student will experience an equitable school community where student health and well-being are prioritized, and student voice is centered.
- **GOAL 3: Academic Growth and Excellence** | Every student will acquire critical and creative thinking skills, meet/exceed high academic standards, and achieve their highest academic potential.
- **GOAL 4: Equitable Access and Opportunity** | Every student will have access to high-quality academic programming and resources to support their success.
- **GOAL 5: Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation** | Every student will graduate ready to thrive in life after high school and with the skills to navigate, adapt, and innovate for a sustainable future.

"The strategic plan is FCPS' North Star in ensuring excellence, equity, and opportunity for each and every student now through 2030," said Superintendent Dr. Michelle C. Reid. "I am incredibly grateful to the entire Fairfax County community for partnering with us to co-author our strategic plan. Together, we have created a blueprint for mountaintop educational opportunities that will support closing achievement gaps and help our students fulfill their greatest academic potential."

The next steps for implementing the strategic plan involve aligning, prioritizing, and organizing the work of the school division, and establishing a monitoring and reporting structure for the plan.

The five guiding principles that informed the development of the new strategic plan are:

- **Student-centered:** Keep students at the center.
- **Engaging diverse voices:** Create multiple avenues for parents/caregivers, student, staff, and community engagement.
- **Data-driven:** Use data to drive the development of the plan.
- **Alignment:** Create unity of purpose.
- **Research-based:** Development approach and content guided by research.



What's New in FCPS

Play Pays Off as Impact of Middle School Recess is Felt Across Fairfax County

At the beginning of the 2022-23 school year, FCPS introduced middle school recess after a pilot program showed this age group does better in the classroom when free play factors into their day.

According to principals, students, and teachers, that decision, along with the move to eliminate cell phone usage, is already paying dividends.

Now, on blacktops and playing fields at schools across the county, pick-up football, games of tag, and huddles of UNO take place each day.

With phones "away for the day," conversations have now replaced texting and friendships are being formed and strengthened.

"Watching everything that is happening during recess is a nice reminder that these children are still only 12 years old and they benefit from unstructured play," said Walt Whitman Middle School Assistant Principal Matthew Johnson.

He added, "We are seeing that kids are more focused in the classroom and in a better mood. It has been a game changer."

In April 2021, the Fairfax County School Board voted to update its student and staff health and wellness policy to allow for the daily 15-minute recess. The change received unanimous support and is aligned with the focus on the social-emotional learning of all our students.



Fairfax County Public Schools Launches Flexible Twilight School Program to Help Seniors Graduate on Time

For some seniors, whether they graduate or not comes down to a tough reality, such as attending school or helping support their families or themselves.

That is the situation West Potomac High School senior Madelyn found herself in late last year. With the responsibility of a younger sibling to take care of, her schoolwork became less of a priority.

To help Madelyn and others like her, FCPS began a pilot program this spring to provide instruction outside of traditional school hours for students at six

high schools across the division. Students meet with teachers in-person, three days a week, from 4 to 6 p.m. and work independently from home for the remaining two days.

"These students are facing difficult times that none of us can even imagine having to manage at a school age," said Joe Thompson, special projects administrator for the Non-Traditional Schools and Programs who oversees the pilot.

"For example, they can be responsible for sibling child care, for financially supporting their family as the primary wage earner, and there can be transportation issues that hinder attendance.

"The smaller setting, the flexible setting, the one-on-one aspect, has really given these students the support they need to succeed."

Fairfax County Public Schools Welcomes First-in-Nation Neurodiversity Specialist Amongst Two New Hires to Support Students Who Learn Differently

This year, FCPS became the first public school division in the nation to hire a Neurodiversity Specialist to help ensure students who learn differently, including those with autism or attention challenges, reach their full potential.

Kristen Haynor, stepped into her dream role advocating for our neurodiverse students in the 2022-23 school year. She is believed to be the first neurodiversity specialist in a U.S. K-12 public schools setting, and she hopes her appointment will inspire other districts to follow suit.

Haynor was joined recently by Nonye Oladimeji, who began as the division's — and Virginia's — first public school Twice Exceptional (2E) Education Specialist. Students considered 2E are identified as academically gifted in one or more areas of exceptionality and also identified by federal/state eligibility criteria to have a disability or multiple disabilities.

Both positions reflect FCPS' understanding that there are many different, yet equally valid, ways to learn and that we owe it to our young people to provide a school experience that is equitable and accessible to all. FCPS is proud to be leading the way in this field.

"My role does not exist in another U.S. public K-12 education setting and I go to bed every night giving thanks for this opportunity, this equity work is essential," said Haynor who is a graduate of Flint Hill Elementary School, Thoreau Middle School, and James Madison High School.

2022-23 School Board Chair Rachna Sizemore Heizer was the driving force behind the creation of both positions.



Want to Teach? Trainee Program Helps Get Qualified Educators in the Classroom

Catherine Coulter seems like the perfect hire for any Fairfax County Public School community looking to bring on a new teacher. Coulter, who has a master's degree in education, six years of classroom teaching experience, and is an FCPS grad herself, had long wanted to teach in the community where she grew up.

Amid headlines about national and regional teacher shortages, Coulter was eager to stay in the classroom. There was just one hiccup — Coulter has a middle school teaching certification, and she hoped to pivot to teaching elementary students.

A new FCPS teacher trainee program is helping Coulter, and others like her, bridge the gap to start teaching this fall while finishing up requirements to become fully licensed in Virginia. Coulter started in September as a fifth grade teacher at Fairview Elementary School in Fairfax Station, while taking a four week class in elementary education instructional methods. "My end goal in being a teacher was always to come back to FCPS and work here," said Coulter, who spent the last three years teaching in Washington, D.C. "I had the best educational experience here and honestly the reason I wanted to become a teacher is because of the experience I had as a student in FCPS."



Building Our Future: Capital Improvement Projects

The Capital Improvement Program (CIP) includes dollars for renovations, modular classrooms, additions to existing schools, and construction of new schools. The Fairfax County Public Schools CIP annually reviews current student membership analysis and facilities data to identify future capacity needs and capital requirements. The CIP for FY 2024-28 includes a five-year membership projection, program capacity utilization, and potential solutions to consider for each school with a capacity deficit.



COMPLETED

West Potomac High School

An addition was constructed at West Potomac High School to accommodate increasing enrollment. The building had a program capacity utilization percentage of 119% in SY 2021-22, indicating a substantial capacity deficit. The completed project provides approximately 71,000 SF and includes science classrooms and a cafeteria. The project construction was funded by the 2019 bond, with planning and design phase funded by the 2017 bond.

IN PLANNING

Dunn Loring Elementary School

The Dunn Loring Administrative Center project will create a new elementary school, addressing the needs of a rapidly growing community and restoring the site to its original purpose. Honoring the historical significance of the building and land is an important part of the project. Artifacts from the original building will be preserved and displayed in the future elementary school. Additional ways to honor this important history are also being considered.

Funding: 2021 Bond (Planning/Design)
Future Building Area: 118,000 SF
Estimated Completion: 2027

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Cooper Middle School

The Cooper Middle School project was identified according to the Renovation Queue, approved in 2009 with additions totaling approximately 179,000 SF. The completed project will provide modern amenities, new classrooms, library, administrative offices, and site improvements including parking, along with removing a modular classroom.

Funding: 2015 Bond (Planning), 2019 Bond (Construction)
Future Building Area: 179,000 SF
Anticipated Future Capacity: 1120
Estimated Completion: Fall 2023

Career and Technical Education — A Pathway to Hands-On Success

Our renowned Career and Technical Education programs are second to none. From nursing and cyber security, to carpentry and marketing, our talented instructors bring real world skills and career qualifications that are in demand in today's workplace right to the classroom. If they so choose, our students can graduate and walk straight from school into a valued profession.



Classroom to Career: FCPS and Giant Team Up to Offer Internships, Job Opportunities to Pharmacy Tech Students

Gidion Adjei was working a fast food gig during his senior year at West Potomac High School but eager to find something more rewarding. When his Pharmacy Technician teacher told him about a partnership between FCPS and Giant Pharmacy that would allow him to earn school credit, get hands-on experience, and potentially lead to a paid position, Gidion knew he had to jump on the opportunity.

Gidion began reporting to Giant a couple of days a week, shadowing pharmacists, processing prescriptions, and dealing with patient insurance. Giant's District Pharmacy Manager Erin Meerzaman says the tasks assigned to interns aligns with the material students are learning in the classroom.

"So when they're learning about calculating dosing, that's something they practice at the pharmacy," Meerzaman said.

After just a couple months as an intern, Gidion was hired as a paid employee, and has become a valued member of the Giant pharmacy staff. He worked through the summer at the pharmacy before heading to Norfolk State University where he plans to study biology and pursue a career in pharmacy.

Half of Century of Inspiring Kids: FCPS Grads Turned Auto Shop Teachers Recount Decades of Service

Veteran auto technology teachers and best friends Dominic Prakash and David Plum have more than 50 years combined teaching experience in Fairfax County Public Schools.

The Lake Braddock Secondary School automotive instructors first met in an FCPS auto class themselves at South Lakes High School in the 1980s.

After working as lead automotive technicians at dealerships, both wound up as teachers and have run the Lake Braddock auto shop together for almost 25 years.

They say they share the same work ethic, and trust each other to keep the students' best interests at heart, whether someone is college-bound and wants hands-on experience before majoring in engineering or aiming for a career as an auto technician themselves.

"They are the two teachers whose class I look forward to every single day," student Wesley Carson said. "They teach that life is a lot like operating a manual transmission — you stall sometimes, but you let up the clutch, roll backwards a bit and then keep pushing forward."



Innovation Every Day

Out of This World Idea with a Local Impact: Middle Schoolers Use Vertical Farming System to Feed Families

Tucked behind Luther Jackson Middle School is a small ordinary-looking shed, but step inside and you'll see a futuristic vertical farming operation run by engineering students and supported by grant funding from Northrop Grumman, Dominion Energy and the Micron Opportunity Fund at the Community Foundation to end of first sentence in Google content doc.

Plastic towers are bursting with green spinach and lettuce leaves that will soon be donated to the school's food pantry. Next to the tower sits a large circular water tank that houses about 50 tilapia fish. The complex ecosystem, known as hydroponics, will allow the fish waste to nourish the plants as the plants filter the fish's water.

"The students have worked on every part of this," said Mark Smith, the director of the Luther Jackson Middle School ESTEEM Center. "They have to get the environment just right for this to be successful."

The goal is to create food with limited resources, said eighth grader Dahlia Kasso.

Students started the project two years ago with beta testing plants and a small fish tank.

"We've had PH problems and ammonia problems that have really set us back," Dahlia adds.

"Sometimes the solution isn't so obvious. So we have to keep an open mind."



Food or Fertilizer? Edison High School Students Explore the Use of Bugs in Global STEM Challenges Program

The Global STEM Challenges Program at Thomas A. Edison High School has students tackling major environmental issues year-round.

The three-year program, in which ninth graders focus on food access and agricultural issues, 10th graders target clean water and 11th graders contemplate sustainable energy, makes Earth Day every day.

Global STEM Challenge Program students are tasked with problem solving in teams of their peers, researching current solutions to vexing global matters and then coming up with their own plans to tackle them.

Two groups saw insects as an untapped resource for helping the environment.



Chantilly High School Students Seek Patent for Walker Designed to Help Parkinson's Patients

Kaavya Karthikeyan and Akanksha Tibrewala attended Greenbriar West Elementary School, Rocky Run Middle School, and Chantilly High School together. With a little extra time on their hands in the height of the pandemic, the two neighbors started playing around with modifying a traditional walker to make it more helpful to people with Parkinson's.

Akanksha's great-grandmother suffers from paralysis on the right side of her body, and Kaavya's neighbor has a grandfather with Parkinson's disease.

"Our personal experiences had shed light onto the issue of people with degenerating muscles," Akanksha said. "We wanted to do something to help address that."

And so, AutoTrem was born. The walker on wheels will automatically move forward with the press of a button, and is equipped with a sensor at the front that stops movement if an obstacle is detected in its path.

A laser on the top bar of the walker shines light on the ground, and users are directed to try to have their foot reach where the light is — with the goal of increasing stride length over time.

Their work involved consulting with actual patients at physical therapy offices and senior centers, getting their feedback and making adjustments along the way.

The friends won the Fairfax Area Student Shark Tank competition, sponsored by the Fairfax Area 50+ Technology Committee, snagging a \$2,500 cash prize for their efforts.

Akanksha and Kaavya say their work isn't over yet though.

The duo filed for a U.S. patent, and are awaiting word on if they receive one.



One student group turned an unused file cabinet in a Fairfax County Public Schools storage warehouse into a bug incubator. Students transformed the file cabinet into a home for black soldier flies, and plan to use their larvae as a more environmentally friendly food source.

In the same classroom, another group is building a container for mealworms, gathering their "frass," or waste product, which will drop through a mesh lining on the bottom of the crate into a collection unit to use as fertilizer. Mealworms happily eat plastic, PVC and styrofoam, thereby reducing the waste associated with those materials as well, the students say.

"Our goal is to teach students to break the mold in thinking about critical issues for our society and our planet," Lead Global STEM Challenges Program Teacher Chris Kniesly, says. "In a traditional classroom, things are very prescribed, you teach a set of circumstances and students are tested on their understanding. In this program, we want students to upend circumstances so they can become changemakers in their future careers."



FCPS Is a Caring Community

We support and welcome diversity in all forms at FCPS. Our students and staff bring with them differences of religion, race, geography, economic status, and gender identity. We pride ourselves on being a safe space where all can flourish and be appreciated for who they are.



Coates Family Academy Has Parents Learning Tips to Support Kids in FCPS

On Thursday evenings at Lutie Lewis Coates Elementary School in Herndon, roughly 20 parents are reporting for class.

The Coates Elementary Family Academy is intended to be a boot camp of sorts for families adjusting to the American public education system. Family Liaison Solangie McPherson came up with the idea two years ago, when, in the throes of the pandemic, she saw a need to bolster parent-teacher relationships at the school, where almost half of the students are English language learners, and many families are new to the U.S.

And so, the Coates Family Academy was created: those interested take courses in everything from early literacy supports, to school vocabulary, parenting lessons, computer/technology systems, and parent rights/responsibilities. The program was created by Coates' family liaison McPherson, with the support of Edu-Futuro, an FCPS Ignite partner.

Yesika Cruz, a Honduran immigrant who is the mother of a fifth grader at Coates, says she attends the weekly sessions because she wants to know what the expectations are for parents within FCPS.

"I am learning how to talk to teachers, who needs to be contacted when my child is sick, what types of questions I should ask at conferences like what different levels mean for reading and math, how I can help at home," Cruz says.



Students Get Free Prom Attire at FCPS-Run Dress Shop

A prom dress shop run by marketing students from the Fair Oaks Classroom on the Mall program has helped hundreds of financially challenged students attend prom in style each spring since 2006 by providing dresses and accessories at no cost to students.

The marketing students apply the retail marketing and visual merchandising skills learned throughout the school year to transform a classroom into the Prom Dress Shop.

"Students apply learned marketing lessons to a real-world retail environment," said Miranda Schick, Centreville High School and Classroom on the Mall marketing teacher. "And they support the School Board's goals of helping students succeed beyond the classroom through Portrait of a Graduate attributes, including communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and global citizenship skills."



Engineering with Empathy: Carson Middle School Students Design Devices to Help Those in Need

Eighth grader Rishab Nanduri made a brace to help people with spinal cord injury inspired by his father's back pain woes. His classmate Aasritha Duriseti made a specialized bottle cap opener after watching her grandmother struggle to open things on her own. And Roman Moreno-Hines made a "third thumb" that he hopes will help people with arthritis hold objects longer after noticing his grandfather's difficulty hanging onto coffee mugs.

It's all part of an "Engineering With Empathy" unit created by Rachel Carson Middle School Instructor Mark Bolt for students in his Engineering 3 elective course.

"The overarching goal of this project is for my students to understand that empathy is an important component of engineering," Bolt says. "Engineers need to understand their users' needs, and put themselves in the users' shoes, in order to then build an effective solution."

Bolt challenged his students to start the project by researching various disabilities and the obstacles individuals must overcome to perform daily tasks. Then he had students construct an adaptive device, have classmates test it and give feedback that can be used to improve the item.

"I loved the real world element," said Rishab Nanduri, who made the back brace with velcro straps, chipboard, and fabric that he hopes would help people like his father on a daily basis.



See Our Amazing Students Shine

Our students amaze us every single day. We encourage them to reach for the stars.

Kilmer Middle School Student Organizes First Ever Nationwide Spelling Bee for Mongolian Immigrants

Last year, Erdem Dulguun, a Kilmer Middle School eighth grader, made history by organizing the first ever Mongolian Spelling Bee competition.

Not only that but he gave up his Friday evenings to offer free virtual spelling tutoring to dozens of Mongolian immigrant children across the U.S.

Last October, the then 13-year-old welcomed many of those children to The World Bank in Washington, D.C., to take part in the first-ever community spelling bee for American Mongolian students that has Scripps' support.

Special guest at the event was Batbayar Ulziidelger, the Mongolian Ambassador to the U.S. The Mongolian Embassy hosted the participating students and their families for a meet and greet.

"I wanted to help the Mongolian community because I love keeping my ties with this country, it's very important to me," said Erdem, who is Mongolian by descent. "I'm not exactly the best teacher, I'm not that much of a public speaker because I get nervous, but it is a good feeling to share what I know."

His own spelling skills were honed at Westbriar Elementary School in Vienna when as a sixth grader he finished as the 1st Runner-Up in the Fairfax County Spelling Bee 2021 and was our region's alternate to go to the 2021 Scripps National Spelling Bee.



Reaching for the Stars: Thomas Jefferson Students Build and Launch Satellite into Space — the Culmination of a Seven-Year Project

The launch was the culmination of seven years of hard work for TJ Space. Led by Robotics Lab Director Kristen Kucko, many students from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology have had a hand in this historic launch.



From Paris for \$50 to K-Pop Immersion in Seoul: Annandale High School Students Win Study Abroad Scholarships

Barcelona. Berlin. Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula. Ghana. Rome. These are some of the places where 19 Annandale High School students spent their summer, aided by a collective \$75,085 in scholarship funding they won after being encouraged to apply for the grants by their teachers.

"For \$50, I'm going to Paris," Meilhi Leon, a freshman, says. Meilhi says she learned about the opportunity, which comes through CIEE Global Navigator's School Partnership program, in French class.

Annandale High School has a special partnership with the Council on International Exchange that results in some funding being earmarked for the school because of its commitment to world language instruction and having staff who are working to build awareness of scholarship opportunities to study abroad.

Annandale High School teachers pitched the program to students as a great opportunity to learn how to fill out applications, a life skill they hope the teens will remember when they begin the college application process, says Laura Wells, who coordinates the school's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program. AVID classes seek to assist students with organization, writing, and college/career awareness.

"This chance to put themselves outside of their comfort zone is also important to success in college," she says. "Studies show that one factor impacting the ability to adjust to college is having had an experience living away from your parents — whether study abroad, living on a college campus — so I am always trying to push kids to seek out these types of programs. It's an enrichment opportunity."



"TJ REVERB is significant because the CubeSat was designed, built, coded and integrated entirely by high school students," said Kucko. "The students did not use a satellite kit, nor did they have an industry or university partnership to assist them. Building satellites is not an easy task. According to Col. Nick Hague, astronaut, countries have not been able to build CubeSats. The students in TJ Space should be proud of their accomplishments."

CubeSats are a small satellite, about the size of a tissue box. The technology was developed by Cal Poly and has become the industry standard. CubeSats allows for more standardized and cheaper deployment of satellites. TJ was the first high school in the world to launch its own CubeSat in 2013, called the TJ3SAT.



Shining a Spotlight on the Arts



Student Theater Critics Learn Art of Writing Reviews, Help Honor Peers Through Cappies Program

The Cappies (Critics and Awards Program) is an international effort to recognize, celebrate, and provide learning experiences for high school theater and journalism students that was launched in FCPS.

Within each Cappies program, high schools from participating districts may select three to nine students for a critic team. After receiving intensive training in theater criticism and review writing, the team attends plays and musicals at other high schools in their area, and then writes 300-600 word reviews on deadline.

Volunteer teacher-mentors lead discussions and select the critic-written reviews that are later published by area newspapers, with student bylines. The student critics also determine who will be placed on a Cappies award ballot in each of 39 award categories.

At the end of the season, the critics who have reviewed five or more shows may vote for the Cappies award winners. A gala awards ceremony is held at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., every June.

DID YOU KNOW?

South Lakes High School won 10 Cappies this year for their production of *Bright Star*, more than any other school in the D.C. region.

"When I Sing, It Feels Like I Am Floating in a Space of My Own"

Nine talented students from Daniels Run Elementary School in Fairfax flew to Florida this spring after being selected to perform at a national music teachers convention.

The seven sixth-graders and two fifth-graders made it through a tough audition process competing against elementary-aged students from across the U.S. and Canada. They were amongst more than 100 students performing in front of an audience of school music teachers at the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE) National Conference in March.

"When I sing, it feels like I'm floating in a space of my own, flying away from the world and all its problems," said sixth grader Nelson Doll.

For fifth grader Grace Bhatia, a musical collaboration with her peers makes it even more fun.

"I get a little shy by myself but when you are singing with others, it is different," she said.

Amongst the music being performed is a traditional Ukrainian song and a Macedonian folk song along with pieces by Schubert and Bach.



Student Mentors, Led by Sisters, Share Love of Music

On Tuesdays after school, a group of middle and high school students volunteer their time and share their passion for classical music while mentoring elementary students at Dogwood Elementary School.

The room is filled with lively sounds from the piano and string instruments, layered with laughs and words of encouragement.

Founders — and sisters — Ella Kim, of Oakton High School, and Emma Kim, of Rachel Carson Middle School, first performed piano and violin at Dogwood as part of an Instagram takeover for WETA's Classical Radio Station, highlighting their lives as young classical musicians.

They decided that they wanted to bring Dogwood students free



Specializing in Special Education



Marching On: Student Who Is Deaf Shines on the Woodson Drumline

Michael Gouin, a junior last year at Woodson High School, is completely deaf, but you wouldn't know when you listen to him play his snare drum as part of his school's drumline.

"I've been playing for about four years," said Michael. "Other instruments have different sounds and it's very hard for me to hear. The drum only has one sound. It's louder than other instruments, so it works well for me."

Two drumsticks in hand and a cochlear implant tucked behind his right ear, Michael remains on beat with the rest of the drumline. He keeps an eye on an erasable white board at the front of the group with written instructions. During his second year in the marching band, Michael has found a system that works, but not without challenges.

"Last year I was in the pit. We didn't move around," explains Michael. "Now I'm on the drumline and it's very difficult compared to the pit because we have to move around and look at the drum major at the same time. It's very challenging, but that's why I like it."

The pit, or a stationary group of percussionists, was Michael's assignment during his first year in marching band. But he wanted to go one step further for his junior year and tried out for the drumline.

"It's been a real growing experience for me as a teacher," said Woodson Band Director Aaron Morgan. "It's been great seeing him fulfill his dream of marching with a snare drum," he added.



music lessons on a weekly basis. The sisters began recruiting their friends to join their initiative. They partnered with FCPS teachers to help form music and art curriculums and train mentors on how to teach and engage with the mentees in a fun way. They also created an Amazon wish list that included keyboards, art supplies, and music books.

For Dogwood Principal Kate Beckner, the value of the program is in students inspiring others by sharing their gifts and talents. "It's beautiful to see students sharing their blessings with younger students," she says.

Delicious! Handmade Cookies Get the Thumbs Up from our Superintendent

Young adults with disabilities enrolled in the Culinary Arts program at the Davis Career Center hand-delivered cookies they made from scratch as a special gift to welcome Dr. Reid to FCPS.

The students who swung by her office with the special delivery were enrolled in the program,

which teaches students skills like baking, cooking, catering, and food service. "These look incredible! Wow! My cookies never look this good!" Dr. Reid said in delight as culinary student Isvar Komakula handed her the cookie bouquet. Culinary Teacher Lauren Forshay said the students light up when they see what they've accomplished.

"To be able to see a product from start to finish is very educational and very rewarding for these students," Forshay said.



DID YOU KNOW?

Micah the golden retriever and his trainer Kris Campesi are regular visitors to Key Center School where they help students with math concepts!

Celebrating Our Exemplary Staff

Each year we recognize exceptional employees from across the division at the FCPS Honors event. More than 700 employees in both instructional and operational roles are recognized through the Outstanding Employee Awards Program. This year, 67 finalists representing 12 categories were recognized in the special award ceremony.



Outstanding Elementary New Teacher

Elogien I. Ali | Sixth Grade Teacher, Saratoga Elementary School

Outstanding Secondary New Teachers

Melvin Burch-Bynum | JROTC Marine Senior Instructor, Mount Vernon High School

Outstanding New Principal

KJ An | Eagle View Elementary School

Outstanding School-Based Operational Employees

Alexa Pugnetti | Administrative Assistant I, Woodson High School

Leonard Roberts | Custodian II, Bull Run Elementary School

Outstanding Nonschool-Based Operational Employee

Nicole C. Wheeler | Bus Driver Supervisor, Lorton Center, Transportation

Outstanding School-Based Professional Employee

Katelyn M. Hagen | Intervention Specialist, South County Middle School

Outstanding Nonschool-Based Professional Employee

Ken Wilson | Safety Specialist, Gatehouse Administration Center, Facilities

Outstanding School-Based Leader

Karen J. Hertel | Assistant Principal, Bryant High School

Outstanding Nonschool-Based Leader

Alice Wigington | Executive Director, Budget Services, Gatehouse Administration Center, Financial Services

Outstanding Elementary Teacher

Laura Senturia | Fourth Grade Teacher, Colin Powell Elementary School

Outstanding Secondary Teachers

Daniel J. Miller | English Teacher, Fairfax High School

Annie Ray | Orchestra Director, Annandale High School

Outstanding Principal

April Cage | Garfield Elementary School



To read more about the winners, finalists, and other award related information, please visit www.fcps.edu/fcps-honors or scan the QR code.

14,537 Graduates in Class of 2023 — Farewell and Congratulations to Our Seniors!

“A Premise of Building Hope:” Lewis High School Grads Return to Lynbrook Elementary School to Open Time Capsule

For eight years, Wendy Casual, a former sixth grade teacher, has returned to Lynbrook Elementary School with newly-minted high school graduates who were once her students.

Six years earlier, Casual had her then students build time capsules to be opened in June of their graduation year. The boxes included photos of the then-sixth graders, kind notes to friends, important elementary school projects, and letters to their future selves.

“The whole thing was based around a premise of building hope,” Casual, now a resource teacher and instructional coach at Ravensworth Elementary School, says.

More than a dozen of Casual’s sixth grade students from 2017 met their former teacher in their elementary school cafeteria this summer and opened the time capsule.

Wignar Manzanares, who just graduated from Lewis High School, looks down at her sixth grade paper and is surprised.

“I see I said that my dreams are that I want to be a doctor or a police officer,” Manzanares says. “I don’t remember writing that, but now I’ve graduated and I’m actually hoping I will be accepted into the police academy.”

Casual says these are the types of reactions she hoped to see when creating the time capsules. “I want the kids to say ‘I had a journey, I was successful and hopefully they recognize that Lynbrook Elementary played a part in it,’” she says. “They’re never too young to think about the future.”





Teen Mom Is First in Family to Graduate: Bryant Senior Delivers Speech, Inspiration

Anyeli Salguero, a 16-year-old Bryant High School senior, received her high school diploma this June, a year ahead of schedule, with her 20-month-old daughter in her arms.

In doing so, she made history in her family: A Honduran immigrant who moved to the U.S. at age 7 while speaking little English, Anyeli is the first to earn a high school diploma.

Her mother and father both left school after eighth grade, and her grandmother stopped going after first grade, she says.

"They are all so proud and excited for me," Anyeli said. "My daughter is proud and excited for me too — like my graduation cap says: my diploma is her future."

Anyeli is grateful for a Fairfax County Public Schools program known as Project Opportunity, an initiative that aims to keep expectant and new parents on track to getting their high school diploma.

She transferred to Bryant High School in 2021, knowing Bryant had a daycare center on site. At first she would trudge to school in the August heat while seven months pregnant, since she lived less than a mile from the school and didn't qualify for bus service.

She found staff at Bryant were flexible and eager to help. Principal Chris Larrick arranged for her to take a bus to school. Counselor Margaret Veenstra and other Project Opportunity staff helped her obtain a car seat, play pen, and diapers before her daughter was born.

Anyeli says Bryant ensured school could be part of her life as a new mother.

"The staff helped me a lot: there was homebound learning, I had a teacher bring both school work and diapers to my house, and I applied for the daycare in the building and by the time I was ready to go back to school my daughter had been accepted."

She heads to Northern Virginia Community College in the fall, where she plans to study business administration and get her associate's degree.

"I get a lot of judgment being a mom at such a young age," she says. "But, I see my future as bright right now."



It Takes a Village



Native American IT Manager Taps Cultural Roots in 30-Year FCPS Career

Rufus "Rick" Kelly knows he could do information technology work anywhere. But the Fairfax County Public Schools' senior technology specialist says his Native American roots and cultural upbringing led him to a 30-year career in public education.

While working for a large technology company in his 20s, Kelly says he realized he wanted to do something else with his life.

"I needed to satisfy my social conscience," Kelly said, adding his Native American upbringing instilled the value of public education. Over 30 years at FCPS, his work has gone beyond information technology: he's offered input to the Virginia Department of Education on state curriculum and Virginia's Indians. He's met with elementary school classes and hosted learning luncheons with coworkers to teach them about Native American history and beliefs.



Photo Credit: Vincent Schilling

Both Bus Driver...and Mentor

Jay Corwin is a bus driver who took a student with special needs under his wing. The student barely speaks to adults, but has bonded with Jay. Jay visits the student's school once a week for an hour to play games and draw pictures.

"I absolutely love helping people," Jay says. "Before I joined FCPS I was a Fairfax County firefighter for 30 years where I got to help people everyday. When I became a bus driver I saw that I could continue to help people, and it's for that reason I was excited to become a mentor."

Seniors Make A SUBstantial Difference in FCPS Schools

Bunni Cooper, or Ms. Bunni as she's known to students, has had students ask her to serve as a fill-in grandma. She's also had a group of "feisty" sixth graders ask her to join them at their cafeteria table for regular lunches — and she obliged. Cooper, who worked at the World Bank for 23 years before retiring and becoming an FCPS substitute, gets hugs in the hallway and warm greetings from students she passes in the hallway on their way to recess.

"I'm not the type to just sit at home and do nothing, so when I retired I looked for a way to pay it forward," Cooper says. "I'm 76 — but you don't act it when you're around kids all day."

Cooper, who became an FCPS substitute teacher in 2013, has focused her time almost exclusively at Bull Run Elementary School in Centreville for the past nine years. There is a near-daily need for her assistance, Bull Run Principal Jason Pensler says.



Custodians Care for More Than Buildings

Frank Sarfo, Little Run Elementary School custodian, cares not only about the Little Run building, but also for everyone who uses it. Mr. Frank, as he is affectionately known, is originally from Ghana, where he was a soccer player.

Mr. Frank has been known to fix a student's bike during the school day so the student could ride home. When a kindergartener was anxious and refusing to go to school, he began to excitedly greet him and walk him in. He is a super star in the annual sixth grade vs. school staff kick ball game (dressing head to toe in his Ghanaian soccer uniform).

"Frank comes to school every day to do his assigned job, but he also models kindness," says Little Run Principal Christie Yarn.



Fairfax County School Board Members

The 12 School Board members are elected for four-year terms; one member represents each of the County's nine magisterial districts, and three members serve at large.

Elaine Tholen	Chair and Dranesville District Representative
Karl Frisch	Vice Chair and Providence District Representative
Megan McLaughlin	Braddock District Representative
Tamara Derenak Kaufax	Franconia District Representative
Melanie K. Meren	Hunter Mill District Representative
Ricardy Anderson	Mason District Representative
Karen Corbett Sanders	Mount Vernon District Representative
Laura Jane Cohen	Springfield District Representative
Stella Pekarsky	Sully District Representative
Karen Keys-Gamarra	Member-at-Large
Abrar Omeish	Member-at-Large
Rachna Sizemore Heizer	Member-at-Large
Rida Karim	Student Representative

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